DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 216 272 CG 015 886

AUTHOR Ralston, Penny A.
TITLE Impact of the Neighborhood Senior Center on the Black Elderly: A Comparative Study.
SPONS AGENCY Iowa State Univ. Research Foundation, Inc., Ames.
PUB DATE Nov 81
NOTE 7p.; Paper presented at the Joint Annual Meeting of the Scientific Gerontological Society (34th) and the Scientific & Educational Canadian Association on Gerontology (10th), (Toronto, Ontario, Canada, November 8-12, 1981).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Blacks; *Community Centers; Community Programs; Comparative Analysis; Family Relationship; Friendship; Interpersonal Relationship; Minority Groups; *Older Adults; *Participant Characteristics; *Participation; Program Attitudes; *Program Effectiveness

ABSTRACT

While utilization of senior centers has increased for the older population as a whole, participation rates have been low among the poor and minority elderly. The impact of the neighborhood senior center (NSC) on the black elderly was investigated in terms of disengagement potential, acceptability to others, commitment to become involved in senior centers, perception of senior centers, contact with family, and contact with friends. Three groups of black elderly were interviewed: attenders of a NSC (N=46), non-attenders in the same community (N=33), and non-attenders in a comparable community without a NSC (N=27). The results showed that: (1) the attenders and non-attenders in the community with an NSC were significantly more aware of activities and services in senior centers; (2) the attenders of the NSC were more committed to become involved in senior center programs; and (3) the non-attenders in the community without the NSC had significantly more contact with family and friends. There were no significant differences among the three groups for disengagement potential and acceptability to others. The findings suggest that the NSC appears to have some impact on black elderly community members. (Author/NRB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED216272

Impact of the Neighborhood Senior Center on the Black Elderly: A Comparative Study

Penny A. Ralston, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor
Iowa State University
222C MacKay Hall
Ames, IA 50011

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Penny A. Ralston

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

CG 015886

Summary of poster session presented at the 34th Annual Scientific Meeting of the Gerontological Society of America, Toronto, Canada, November 1981. This study was funded in part by a grant from the Iowa State University Research Foundation.

Summary
Impact of the Neighborhood Senior Center
on the Black Elderly: A Comparative Study

Introduction

Over the past four decades, senior centers have come into existence to help older people adjust or "cope" with growing old in American society (Gubrium, 1973; Kent, 1978; Vickery, 1972). Since the first senior center was founded in New York City in 1943, the number of senior centers has steadily increased (Downing, 1957; Harris, 1975; Kutner et al., 1956).

While utilization of senior centers has increased for the older population as a whole, participation rates have been low for poor and minority elderly (Harris, 1975). Studies have shown that lack of access (i.e., lack of facilities and lack of transportation) is one reason for these low participation rates. However, while lack of access may prevent their involvement, some aged subgroups, such as the black elderly, have shown a desire to be involved in senior centers (Harris, 1975; Ralston, 1978).

To adequately serve black and other minority elderly, it is necessary to explore various strategies and models. One senior center model that has been implemented in some areas is the neighborhood senior center. The neighborhood senior center is a decentralized model where the center is located within the neighborhood to be served, and incorporates programs that reflect the local needs of the elderly (AOA, 1977). While little literature can be found concerning the effectiveness of a neighborhood senior center, several authors have suggested that neighborhood-based services are important in terms of the neterogeneity and ethnicity of the aged population (Bell et al., 1976; Carp and Katooka, 1976; Dorsett-Robinson, 1974; Downing and Copeland, 1980; Holmes et al., 1979; Jackson, 1979; Tissue, 1971).

Problem

This study was concerned with factors affecting utilization of senior centers by the black elderly residing in Waterloo and Davenport, Iowa. Waterloo had a neighborhood-based senior center in the main black residential area, while Davenport, comparable in size and characteristics, did not have a similar neighborhood senior center program. The purpose of the study was to determine the impact of the neighborhood senior center on the black elderly in terms of various utilization factors. These factors included (a) disengagement potential or the propensity to withdraw from social situations, (b) acceptability to others or the feelings of acceptance by others, particularly in senior center settings, (c) commitment to become involved in senior centers, (d) perception of senior centers or the awareness of activities and services in senior centers, and (e) contact with family and friends or the number of friends and family which respondents had contact with on a regular basis.

It is hypothesized that, because there are inherent differences in social and family characteristics of attenders and non-attenders of senior centers (Hanssen et al., 1979; Rosenzweig, 1975; Tissue, 1971; Tuckman, 1967), the three groups will differ significantly in terms of contact with family, contact with friends and disengagement potential. In addition, it is

hypothesized that the three groups will differ significantly in terms of perception of senior centers, commitment to become involved in senior centers and acceptability to others. The basis for this hypothesis is that the establishment of a neighborhood senior center may have an effect on non-attenders as well as attenders in terms of their awareness of senior center activities and services, their commitment to participate or become involved in senior center programs, and their feelings of being accepted by others, particularly in senior center settings.

The specific objectives of the study were to:

1. Determine factors affecting utilization of senior centers for black elderly attenders and non-attenders of a neighborhood senior center, and

2. Compare factors affecting utilization of senior centers among three groups of black elderly: (a) attenders of a neighborhood senior center, (b) non-attenders of senior centers in the same community, and (c) non-attenders of senior centers in a comparable community without a neighborhood senior center.

For this study, an attender was defined as a person who utilized a senior center at least once a week. Non-attenders were those who had not attended a senior center or who had done so on an infrequent basis. The black elderly were defined as persons of Afro-American descent who were 60 years of age or older.

Method

An interview schedule was constructed to obtain data for the various utilization factors investigated in the study. Items were constructed to determine demographic characteristics (sex, age, marital status, work status, occupation, and educational level), contact with families and contact with friends. Other items and standardized scales were selected to measure disengagement potential (Tissue, 1968, 1971), acceptability to others (Fey, 1955), commitment to become involved in senior centers (Ralston, 1978) and perception of senior centers (Ralston, 1981).

The population for the study was black elderly residing in Waterloo and Davenport, Iowa. Using referral techniques, 246 (53%) of black elderly were identified in Waterloo and 78 (25%) of black elderly were identified in Davenport. A quota sampling procedure was employed to select the sample. Interviews were conducted with 106 respondents, including 46 Waterloo attenders, 33 Waterloo non-attenders and 27 Davenport non-attenders. Data were collected by trained interviewers in the summer of 1980.

In order to determine whether or not there were significant differences among the three groups in the factors affecting senior center utilization, an analysis of variance (ANOVA) design was used. The groups (Waterloo attenders and non-attenders; Davenport non-attenders) were the independent variable, while the dependent variables were disengagement potential (25 point scale), acceptability to others (25 point scale), commitment to become involved (3 point scale), perception of senior centers (29 point scale), contact with friends and family (mean number of friends and mean number of relatives with which respondents had regular contact).

Results

In terms of demographic characteristics, the three groups were similar in terms of educational level, occupation and work status. Differences in the group were apparent in terms of sex, age and marital status. In general, the Waterloo non-attender group included more males, had more respondents in the 60-64 age group and had more respondents who were married than the other two groups.

The results of the one way analyses of variance indicated that there were significant differences among the three groups in commitment to become involved in senior centers ($p<.01$), perception of senior centers ($p<.001$), contact with friends ($p<.001$) and contact with family ($p<.001$). The Waterloo attenders were more "committed" to become involved in senior centers and had a higher level of awareness of senior center programs than the other two groups. The Waterloo non-attenders had significantly higher mean scores than the other two groups for contact with family and contact with friends. There were no significant differences among the three groups for disengagement potential and acceptability to others.

Discussion and Conclusion

The results indicate that the neighborhood senior center may have had some impact on the black elderly studied. It was hypothesized that there would be significant differences between attender and non-attender groups on measures of disengagement potential, contact with family and contact with friends. This hypothesis is partially accepted because significant differences were found in terms of contact with family and friends. As expected, the Waterloo non-attenders had significantly higher mean scores for total number of relatives ($\bar{x}=8.3$) and total number of friends ($\bar{x}=3.7$). However, the surprising finding was that the Davenport non-attenders had mean scores closer to the Waterloo attenders for total number of relatives ($\bar{x}=4.9$; 4.8 respectively) and total number of friends ($\bar{x}=2.2$; 3.0 respectively). This suggests that, in terms of these characteristics, the Davenport non-attenders were more similar to the Waterloo attenders than the Waterloo non-attenders.

The second hypothesis suggested that there would be significant differences among the groups in perception of senior centers, commitment to become involved in senior centers and acceptability to others. This hypothesis is partially accepted because significant differences were found in terms of perception of senior centers and commitment to become involved, with Waterloo attenders having significantly higher mean scores ($\bar{x}=25.2$; 1.6) than the Waterloo non-attenders ($\bar{x}=24.1$; 1.1) and Davenport non-attenders ($\bar{x}=20.7$; 1.0). These are predictable findings in that the Waterloo attenders were expected to be more aware of senior center activities and services and to be more "committed" to become involved in senior center programs. The surprising finding was the closeness in mean scores on the perception of senior center measure for the two Waterloo groups. This suggests that, although the Waterloo non-attenders chose not to utilize senior centers, they were still able to identify some senior center activities and services. In other words, having access to the neighborhood senior center may have had some impact on their awareness of "what goes on" in senior centers.

In conclusion, this study has shown that the neighborhood senior center may have had some impact on black elderly attenders and non-attenders in an urban community in Iowa. Impact was demonstrated by the similarities in contact with family and friends between the Waterloo attenders and Davenport non-attenders. In other words, the Davenport non-attenders may have been "potential" senior center participants if they had access to a neighborhood senior center. In addition, impact of the neighborhood senior center was shown in the significant differences between the three groups in commitment to become involved in senior centers and perception of senior centers. In particular, the differences in perception of senior centers showed that Waterloo attenders and non-attenders were similar in their awareness of senior center activities and services.

References

Administration on Aging. Program development handbook for state and area agencies on multipurpose senior centers. Washington, D.C.: Department of Health, Education and Welfare, 1977.

Bell, D., Kasschau, P., and Zellman, G. Delivering services to elderly members of minority groups: A critical review of the literature. Rand Corp., Santa Monica, CA, 1976.

Carp, F.M., and Katooka, E. Health care problems of the elderly of San Franciscos's Chinatown. The Gerontologist, 1976, 16, 30-38.

Dorsett-Robinson, J. (Ed.). The black elders: Workshop and conference proceedings. College of Human Resources, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, IL, 1974.

Downing, J. Factors affecting the selective use of a social club for the aged. Journal of Gerontology, 1957, 12, 81-84.

Downing, R.A. and Copeland, E.J. Services for the black elderly: National or local problems? Journal of Gerontological Social Work, 1980, 2, 289-303.

Gubrium, J. The myth of the golden years, A socioenvironmental theory of aging. Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas, 1973.

Harris, L. and Associates, Inc. The myth and reality of aging in America. National Council on Aging, Inc., 1975.

Holmes, D., Holmes, M., Steinbach, L., Hausner, T., and Rocheleau, B. The use of community-based services in long-term care by older minority persons. The Gerontologist, 1979, 19, 389-397.

Jackson, J.J. Aging black families and federal policies: Some critical issues. Journal of Minority Aging, 1979, 4, 162-169.

Kent, D. The how and why of senior centers. Aging, 1978, May/June, 2-6.

Kutner, B., Fanshel, D., Togs, A.M., and Langner, T.S. Five hundred over sixty. New York: Russell Sage, 1956.

Ralston, P. Perception of senior centers by black elderly: A comparative study. Unpublished manuscript (Iowa State University, 1981).

Kalston, P. The relationship of self-perceived educational needs and activities of older adults to senior center programs: A community study. Doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois, 1978.

Tissue, T. Social class and the senior citizen center. The Gerontologist, 1971, 11, 196-200.

Vickery, F.E. Creative programming for older adults. New York: Association Press, 1972.